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PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS

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THE PLAGUE SITUATION.

Continuing the information contained in last week's issue of the Public Health Reports, no case of plague was reported in Porto Rico July 15. July 16 a positive diagnosis was made of a case in San Juan which had previously been reported as suspicious. July 17 no new cases. July 18, no new cases. July 19, a positive diagnosis was made of a case at Carolina which had been previously reported as suspicious. This makes the second case occurring in Carolina in addition to the one which developed at Loiza, 3 miles from Carolina, in a patient who had undoubtedly contracted the infection in Carolina. July 20, one new case was reported in San Juan and 2 new cases in Santurce. July 21, there were no new cases. This makes a total up to and including July 21 of 42 cases with 23 deaths in Porto Rico, of which 28 cases occurred in the old city of San Juan; 9 cases in Santurce, a residential suburb of San Juan; 2 at Carolina, a town 13 miles from San Juan; 1 at Loiza, a short distance from Carolina; 1 at Arroyo; and 1 at Dorado.

In Habana, July 22, a case which had been considered suspicious was positively diagnosed to be plague. The patient had resided in Baratillo Street in the same house as the second case of plague reported. The patient had been ill for nine days, during which time he had been isolated. Over 3,000 rats have been caught and necropsied in Habana without the finding of any rats that were plague infected.

ADDITIONS TO QUARANTINE REGULATIONS—PRECAUTIONS AGAINST RATS LEAVING VESSELS.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, July 10, 1912.

To National, State, and local quarantine officers, collectors of customs, shipowners and agents, and others concerned:

In accordance with the act of Congress approved February 15, 1893, and to further prevent the entrance of plague into the United States, the following regulation, in addition to those contained in Quarantine Regulations of the Treasury Department issued October

20, 1910, is hereby promulgated and shall remain in force until otherwise ordered:

Vessels from ports in South America and the West Indies, Africa, Russia, China, India, and the Pacific Islands, while lying in United States ports, shall have all lines or hawsers leading to wharves or shore, protected by rat guards (for description see p. 907, Public Health Reports, June 7, 1912), and all gangplanks shall be raised at night unless men be placed nearby to destroy escaping rats.

FRANKLIN MACVEAGH,
Secretary.

THE TECHNIQUE OF THE LABORATORY EXAMINATION OF RATS FOR PLAGUE.

Being a condensation of an article on "Plague Infection in Rats," by GEORGE W. McCoy, Passed Assistant Surgeon, Public Health Bulletin No. 30, "The Rat and its Relation to the Public Health."

The clinical manifestations of plague in rats are of little importance. It is generally said that the plague-infected rat staggers about with a drunken gait, loses fear of its natural enemies, and is readily captured. The experience with artificially infected rats indicates that the animals show no marked manifestations of illness until shortly before death when they become quiet, crouch in the corner of the cage, and try to hide.

As plague is a disease that gives rise to such characteristic gross pathological lesions in man and in laboratory animals, it is but reasonable to expect that equally distinctive lesions would be found in the rat, and this we find to be the case.

As to the comparative value of microscopical and macroscopical methods of diagnosis, the Indian Plague Commission (3) states that:

The results of tests carried out for the purpose of comparison make it manifest that the naked eye is markedly superior to the microscopical method as an aid in diagnosis, and as the result of our experience we are prepared to make a diagnosis of plague on the strength of the macroscopical appearances alone, even though the other results of cutaneous inoculation and culture are negative and the animal shows signs of putrefaction.

To one who is acquainted with them, these lesions are as characteristic as those of any infectious disease in man. It is quite true that occasionally atypical cases are encountered where the majority of the gross lesions are wanting, and in such cases it becomes necessary to resort to the inoculation of animals or to cultural investigations in order to make a diagnosis. Such cases are, however, if anything, rarer than are atypical post-mortem findings in pneumonia or in typhoid fever in man.

MODE OF EXAMINATION.

The mode of examining rats for plague infection is as follows:

Rats are immersed in any convenient antiseptic to kill fleas and other ectoparasites that might carry infection from the plague-infected rat. They are then nailed to a shingle by an attendant. Another attendant reads off the address on the tag attached to the rat, puts a check number on the shingle, and records the address and check number on the card shown on page 1187. After being checked, the rats are dissected by reflecting the skin from the whole front of the body and neck so as to expose the cervical, axillary, and inguinal